

Shepherding God’s Flock: Leadership Implications of 1 Peter 5:1–11 for Contemporary Church Elders

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Abstract

This paper examines the Petrine model of shepherd leadership in 1 Peter 5:1–11 within its context, a passage that addresses the role and responsibilities of elders within a Christian community. It also explores the contemporary application of the understanding of elders’ roles and responsibilities in a context marked by institutional challenges, leadership crises, and shifting cultural values. Addressing elders serving in situations of suffering and marginalization, Peter presents a vision of leadership that is neither hierarchical nor self-centered but characterized by humility, willingness, vigilance, and sacrificial care for God’s people. The study highlights the character traits of the shepherd-leader, emphasizing virtues such as meekness, humility, courage, and perseverance in the face of hardship. In addition, it highlights the nature of pastoral authority, demonstrating that it is grounded in humility and accountability and exercised through exemplary conduct rather than dominance. The article also explores the communal aspect of leadership, emphasizing the shared responsibility of elders and congregants in nurturing a spiritually healthy and resilient church that values community. Peter’s exhortation offers both a corrective critique of leadership models driven by power, status, or numerical success and a constructive vision of leadership rooted in faithfulness to Christ and sustained by divine grace. The paper concludes that a recovery of the biblical model of shepherd leadership is essential for fostering spiritually healthy, resilient, and mission-oriented church communities in today’s context.

Keywords: Church Leadership, Eldership, Shepherd Leader, Christ the Chief Shepherd

Introduction

1 Peter 5:1–11 addresses the elders ministering within early Christian communities facing significant suffering, but the theological principles articulated transcend historical context, guiding ecclesial leadership across cultures and generations. This study examines the biblical text and



presents an application that focuses on three interconnected dimensions of church leadership: the character of the shepherd-leader, the nature and exercise of pastoral authority, and the shared responsibility of the entire congregation. The exhortation reframes leadership not as a position of dominance or personal advancement but as a divinely entrusted vocation centered on shaping others through service, humility, and accountability. Peter bases pastoral authority on the relationship of the human under-shepherd to Christ, the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4), situating church leadership within an eschatological horizon of hope and responsibility. Authority is seen not as coercion or force, but as a call to proper conduct and faithful oversight. The theological framework Peter presents then challenges all manner of leadership structures rooted in power, status, or material success. It calls the church to recover a model of leadership that reflects the character of Christ, who demonstrated selflessness and advocated for spiritual well-being for the people of God.¹

Broadly, 1 Peter affirms that the epistles are concerned with the formation of a distinct Christian identity in contexts of marginalization and the social pressures that may accompany them. Within this framework, 1 Peter 5:1–11 serves as a culminating exhortation that not only addresses leadership structures but also influences the ethical and spiritual stance of the entire community. As Achtemeier notes, the Petrine instruction to elders is not simply administrative but deeply theological, grounding leadership in the redemptive work of Christ and the reality of suffering.² Thus, Petrine leadership cannot be reduced to functional roles but must be understood within a wider theological vision of the church as the people of God under divine care. In light of contemporary discussions on leadership, particularly within postmodern ecclesial contexts, the Petrine model offers both a critique and a constructive alternative. The present study contributes to this ongoing conversation by grounding servant leadership not merely in organizational theory but in a robust biblical and theological framework.

Therefore, this article seeks to demonstrate that Petrine leadership provides a coherent and enduring model for contemporary church practice, integrating theological depth, ethical responsibility, and communal participation. By situating leadership within the dynamics of

¹ Karen H. Jobes, Robert W. Yarbrough, and Joshua Jipp, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 298.

² Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2010).



suffering, humility, and eschatological hope, the study argues that the church today can recover a form of leadership that is both faithful to Scripture and responsive to present challenges.

This article analyzes 1 Peter 5:1–11 and its theological themes, such as shepherding, humility, suffering, and accountability, and synthesizes them into a coherent theological framework for understanding leadership within the church. Engagement with relevant biblical scholarship further ensures that the discussion is grounded within ongoing academic discourse and theological reflection. In addition, the study incorporates an applicative dimension by correlating these theological insights with contemporary leadership realities.

Analysis of 1 Peter 5:1–11

Historical Context of 1 Peter 5:1–11

The exhortation in 1 Peter 5:1–11 emerges from a historical setting marked by social marginalization, communal pressure, and the emergence of structures of church leadership within the Roman world in the late first century.³ Most scholars suggest that the composition of Peter was in the early 60s CE. The epistle was addressed to the Christian communities scattered across Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in Asia Minor (1 Pet 1:1). Large-scale imperial persecution had not yet occurred, but Christians were already facing sustained hostility, slander, and exclusion, further creating a context of suffering that largely shaped Petrine pastoral instruction.⁴ In such a pressure-filled, vulnerable environment, church leadership was needed. The elders were not only responsible for teaching and pastoral care, but also for ensuring the proper safeguarding of a call for communal cohesion and spiritual growth. Peter's address to the elders then reflects a church that had begun to develop a non-hierarchical leadership structure, drawing from the Jewish synagogue patterns and early Christian communal practices.

Peter's address to the elders reflects a pattern of plural and collegial leadership in the early Christian communities, where leadership roles such as elders, overseers, and shepherds were closely related and not yet fully differentiated into later hierarchical structures. This structure is often understood by contemporary scholarship as reflecting both Jewish synagogue influence and the developing communal organization of early Christian house churches.⁵ The use of the term

³ Nijay K. Gupta, *1–2 Peter, Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 12.

⁴ John H. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Anchor Bible, 2008), 69–70.

⁵ Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 152.



πρεσβύτεροι (elders) indicates a clear leadership structure in which individuals are entrusted with oversight responsibilities. Peter's identification as a "fellow elder" emphasizes a collegial and shared leadership approach rather than an authoritarian one. The shepherd metaphor in 1 Peter 5:2 is rooted in the Old Testament prophetic tradition, especially in texts like Ezekiel 34, where Israel's leaders are criticized for exploiting the flock rather than caring for it as they were supposed to. In the broader Greco-Roman context, leadership was closely linked to honor and dominance, but Peter redefines leadership as a form of service characterized by humility, willingness, and moral example.

The focus on suffering, vigilance, and resistance in 1 Peter 5 reflects the social reality of early Christian communities living under pressure within the Greco-Roman world. Such opposition was often not systematic imperial persecution but rather local hostility, social marginalization, and cultural suspicion toward Christian groups. Within this context, elders were expected to model steadfast faith, courage, and trust in God's grace, even when leadership involved personal risk. This aligns with broader descriptions of early Christian leadership as functioning within vulnerable house-church settings that required resilience and communal care. Therefore, the historical setting presents a leadership paradigm aimed at preserving the community's faithfulness amid external pressure and internal fragility. The passage reflects a stage in early Christianity in which elders were called to shepherd marginalized and vulnerable believers with humility and courage, a model that continues to inform the church's response to instability, opposition, and crisis in contemporary contexts.

The emphasis on suffering, vigilance, and resistance to the kind of opposition Christians faced (1 Pet 5:8–9) reflects the lived reality of early Christian leaders who ministered in such contexts. Elders were expected to model steadfast faith, courage, and trust in God's grace, even when leadership entailed personal risk. That historical context, therefore, presents a leadership paradigm designed to preserve the church's faithfulness amid pressure. The passage reflects a moment in early Christianity when the elders were called to shepherd fragile communities with total humility and courage, a model of leadership that remains relevant for the churches today as they navigate instability, opposition, and crises in contemporary times.

A Call to Servant Leadership (1 Peter 5:1–4)

Peter exhorts the elders to exercise their leadership in a manner consistent with the example of Christ, serving willingly, eagerly, and humbly rather than for selfish advantage or personal honor



(1 Pet 5:2–3). The instruction not to shepherd “for sordid gain” or to “lord it over others” suggests that Peter was addressing potential abuses of authority within early Christian communities. In the social world of the first century, leadership was often associated with honor, status, and patronage,⁶ but Peter’s exhortation presents a countercultural model in which elders were to lead through humble service rather than domination. This pattern reflects the example of Christ himself, whose suffering and self-giving provided the paradigm for Christian leadership. Peter warns against shepherding that is driven by shameful gain or exercised in a domineering manner. Such practices undermine the pastoral vocation and fracture the community of faith.⁷ Servant leadership ensures that leaders nurture rather than dominate the flock entrusted to them. Church leadership formation should emphasize pastoral care, humility, integrity, and a call for self-sacrificial service to all. Greenleaf argues that a servant-leader is a servant first and chooses to lead primarily to serve others, not to exploit or control them.⁸ That vision resonates well with Peter’s exhortation. It is distinctly theological, grounded in full accountability to God in the imitation of Christ.

The churches need to establish a clear, transparent accountability structure that guards against corruption and abuse of power. Peter’s exhortation urges church leaders to have communal oversight rather than unchecked authority. His emphasis on humility and mutual submission (1 Pet 5:5) fosters a healthy ecclesial environment marked by respect across generations, reduced conflict, and strengthened unity. Such dynamics, then, reflect on the very essence of servant leadership within the household of God.⁹

The Character of the Shepherd (1 Peter 5:2–3)

In 1 Peter 5:2–3, Peter underscores the importance of shepherding the flock willingly and not for personal gain. Those who serve as elders must really embody the character of a shepherd if they are to be faithful to God’s people. Central to this character are the attitudes of willingness and eagerness, which reveal an inner disposition shaped by divine calling rather than by external compulsion (1 Pet 5:2).

⁶ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 26.

⁷ John H. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Anchor Bible, 2008), 795.

⁸ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2002), 13.

⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1996), 346.



These virtues were highly significant in the first-century context, where church leaders ministered amid persecution, social marginalization, and even death.¹⁰ Such pressure may have led the leaders to serve reluctantly or out of fear rather than out of faith. In postmodern settings, while physical persecution may be less prevalent, pastors still face other discouraging realities, such as financial strain, conflicts within the congregation, and ministry burnout. These challenges can lead to joyless and reluctant service. Peter's exhortation, however, makes it clear that any sense of reluctant leadership undermines the faithful ministry. Genuine spiritual leadership flows from a joyful readiness to serve, irrespective of circumstances.¹¹ Strauch emphasizes that biblical elders are not only responsible for teaching sound doctrine but also for modeling Christlike character, including humility, joy, and moral integrity.¹²

Peter's insistence on eagerness highlights that true shepherding is highly motivated not by regard or recognition but by a deep love for God and His people. In 1 Peter 5:4, Peter introduces an eschatological motivation for faithful leadership by promising that when the Chief Shepherd appears, elders will receive the "unfading crown of glory."¹³ This future reward contrasts with temporal honor and reinforces perseverance in humble service. This then reinforces the idea that the ultimate reward comes only from Christ, not from material compensation.

Other vital virtues of shepherding, in addition to the willingness and eagerness urged in 1 Peter 5:2, are sober-mindedness, vigilance, and courage to stand against the devil (and his servants) (1 Pet 5:8-9). Given that suffering and opposition are central themes in 1 Peter, the shepherd metaphor evokes the image of one who bravely defends himself and the flock under him against danger. Spiritual leaders must then courageously guard themselves and the congregations under their care against false teaching, moral compromise, and any spiritual attack. This courage is not abstract but forged through real trials. Biblical narratives such as David's defense of his flock (1 Sam 17:34-37) illustrate that the whole effective shepherding flows from inner spiritual strength and trust in God.¹⁴

¹⁰ W. Grudem, *TNTC: 1 Peter* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 186.

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1-2 Peter and Jude: The Christian Standard Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2020), 236-38.

¹² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, ed. Stephen Sorenson and Amanda Sorenson (Littleton, Colo: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 75-92.

¹³ Karen H. Jobes, Robert W. Yarbrough, and Joshua Jipp, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 313.

¹⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr, *Messiah in the Old Testament, The* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 1995), 123-25.



The Role of the Elders (1 Peter 5:2b-3)

The metaphor of shepherding has deep Old Testament roots, particularly in the prophetic critiques of Israel's leaders as seen in Ezekiel 34:2-16. In this passage, God delivers a strong prophetic indictment against the "shepherds of Israel," a term referring to the kings, priests, and other leaders entrusted with the care of God's people. Ezekiel accuses these leaders of self-interest and neglect, instead of protecting the flock.

In Peter, this imagery is appropriated in 5:2 to define the elder's role as one of care, protection, and provision. The elders are called to share their lives with those they lead, to watch attentively for dangers that may loom, to protect the congregation against danger, and to nourish the flock through faithful godly teaching and examples.¹⁵ Peter addresses the elders in the plural, underscoring the communal nature of church leadership. This kind of plurality then guards against an aspect of authoritarianism and further establishes a system of mutual accountability. Peter's self-identification as a "fellow elder" (1 Pet. 5:1) reinforces the shared leadership model.¹⁶

This perspective calls postmodern churches to resist "lone ranger" models of leadership and instead cultivate a collaborative and collegial form of oversight that reflects the New Testament pattern of shared responsibility.¹⁷ In many contemporary contexts, leadership is often shaped by individual charisma, personal vision, and centralized authority, sometimes at the expense of accountability and communal discernment. However, the Petrine model challenges such tendencies by presenting leadership as inherently relational, participatory, and accountable within the body of Christ. Elders are not isolated figures operating independently, but members of a plurality who together discern, guide, and nurture the community of faith. This shared oversight not only reflects early Christian practice but also provides a safeguard against the dangers of authoritarianism, spiritual abuse, and leadership burnout.

Peter's own life and ministry further reinforce this vision. By identifying himself as a "fellow elder" (1 Pet. 5:1), he models a posture of humility and solidarity rather than hierarchical dominance. His appeal is not grounded in coercive authority but in shared experience, witness to Christ's sufferings, and participation in the promised glory.¹⁸ In doing so, Peter redefines authority

¹⁵ Laniak and Carson, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 189.

¹⁶ Jobes, Yarbrough, and Jipp, *1 Peter* (2005), 292-94.

¹⁷ Julius Gathogo Mutugi, *The Truth About African Hospitality: Is There Hope for Africa?* (The Salt Productions, n.d.).

¹⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2010), 317.



as service, an authority that is exercised without exploitation, compulsion, or self-interest. This reflects a broader New Testament ethic in which leadership is measured not by power but by faithfulness, integrity, and sacrificial care. All pastoral authority, therefore, is understood as derivative, flowing from Christ, the Chief Shepherd, and entrusted to human leaders as stewards rather than owners of God’s flock.¹⁹ Such a theological grounding demands that leadership is exercised with deep humility, attentiveness, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others.

In light of ongoing suffering and spiritual opposition, Peter intensifies this call by urging elders to exercise vigilant and attentive oversight (1 Pet 5:2–3). The exhortation to be “sober-minded” and “watchful” (1 Pet 5:8–10) underscores the seriousness and urgency of spiritual leadership in a hostile, uncertain environment. The imagery of the devil as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour underscores the reality of spiritual conflict and the ever-present threat to the faith and unity of the community. Consequently, elders are called not only to teach and organize but also to function as spiritual guardians who discern potential dangers, confront false teaching, and guide believers toward maturity and stability in Christ.

At the same time, this vigilance is not a solitary endeavor confined to leaders alone. Rather, it is embedded within the life of the entire community, as believers are collectively called to resist the adversary and stand firm in their faith (1 Peter 5:9). Elders, therefore, play a formative role in cultivating a spiritually alert and resilient congregation, one that is capable of discerning truth from error, enduring suffering with hope, and maintaining unity amid external pressures. This communal vigilance strengthens the church’s witness and ensures that its mission is not undermined by internal fragmentation or spiritual complacency.

Importantly, Peter’s exhortation is contrasted by a deep confidence in divine grace. The promise that “the God of all grace... will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet 5:10, NIV) offers a theological basis for perseverance. Leadership, although demanding and often expensive, is upheld not just by human effort but by God’s active and faithful work in His people’s lives. This confidence helps leaders stay steadfast without falling into fear, anxiety, or discouragement. It also shifts their view, reminding them that true success in ministry isn’t measured by immediate results but by faithful participation in God’s redemptive plans. This, therefore, redirects thought and understanding of ministry, ensuring that priority is given to what

¹⁹ Ruth Anne Reese, *1 Peter* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 140.



Christ needs rather than physical outputs that do not really demonstrate what Christ needs from those He has called to the leadership task.

Peter’s exhortation provides a comprehensive view of leadership that includes humility, shared responsibility, spiritual awareness, and dependence on divine grace. It urges the church, especially in postmodern contexts facing leadership crises and individualism, to adopt a leadership model that is truly communal, spiritually rooted, and theologically grounded in Christ, the Chief Shepherd.

Application

Purposeful discipleship and mentoring programs are vital for faithfully passing down faith and fostering the church’s overall growth. According to John H. Elliott, the exhortations in 1 Peter are set within a context of suffering and communal pressure, in which Christian leaders were called to preserve the identity and faithfulness of the believing community.²⁰ Peter’s exhortations remind current leaders that ministry is not a mere career but a divine calling sustained by love. This compels shepherds to bear witness to the gospel and strengthen the church’s faithfulness amid the suffering people experience. The following outlines the text’s application points in contemporary society.

Accountability and Eschatological Hope in Leadership

1 Peter 5:1–11 presents a profound theological vision of leadership, deeply rooted in accountability and eschatological hope. The apostle Peter addresses elders not merely as organizational leaders but as stewards entrusted with a divine responsibility that transcends present structures. Their leadership is framed within the ultimate authority of Christ, whom Peter identifies as the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4). This designation is not incidental; it establishes a hierarchical yet pastoral paradigm in which all human leadership is derivative and accountable. Elders serve under Christ’s lordship, and their ministry is exercised in anticipation of his return. Consequently, leadership is neither autonomous nor self-legitimizing but is fundamentally answerable to Christ, who will evaluate both motives and actions.²¹

This eschatological orientation relocates accountability beyond human systems of evaluation, such as congregational approval, institutional success, or social recognition. It places

²⁰ Elliott, *1 Peter* (New Haven: Anchor Bible, 2008).

²¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter; Jude* (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 2003), 227.



it firmly within the sphere of divine judgment and reward. As Peter reminds his audience, the appearing of Christ will bring about the bestowal of the “unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). This promise functions not merely as encouragement but as a theological assurance of vindication. In a context where Christian leaders often faced marginalization, opposition, and suffering, the assurance of future reward provided a sustaining hope that redefined the meaning of faithfulness. Leadership, therefore, is not validated by immediate outcomes but by enduring fidelity to Christ.²²

The concept of the “unfading crown” also carries significant ethical implications. Unlike the perishable wreaths awarded in Greco-Roman athletic contests, this crown signifies a lasting and incorruptible reward. It underscores the enduring value of faithful service, particularly in contexts where such service may go unnoticed or unappreciated. As contemporary scholarship observes, this eschatological reward reframes leadership motivation, shifting it away from self-interest, honor-seeking, or material gain toward a Christ-centered vision of service.²³ In doing so, it guards leaders against the twin dangers of pride and despair, pride arising from apparent success and despair resulting from suffering or lack of visible progress.

Moreover, Peter’s emphasis on eschatological accountability challenges prevailing models of leadership that prioritize numerical growth, institutional expansion, or public visibility. In many contemporary contexts, leadership effectiveness is often measured by quantifiable outcomes. However, Peter’s framework reorients such metrics by emphasizing ethical integrity, humility, and perseverance. Elders are called to shepherd “not under compulsion, but willingly,” and “not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1 Pet 5:2). This language highlights the leader’s internal disposition as a central criterion of accountability. Leadership is thus evaluated not only by what is achieved but by how and why it is pursued.

This perspective also serves as a safeguard against authoritarian tendencies in leadership. By grounding authority in Christ and subjecting leaders to his future judgment, Peter undermines any claim to absolute or unchecked power. Leaders are reminded that they themselves are under authority and accountable to the Chief Shepherd, who models sacrificial care and humility. As a result, Christian leadership is characterized by service rather than domination, and by example rather than coercion (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3). Recent studies in Petrine theology emphasize that this model

²² Craig Keener and Holly Beers, *1-2 Peter, Jude* (Baker Academic, 2025), 189.

²³ Keener and Beers, *1-2 Peter, Jude*, 157.



fosters a form of communal accountability in which leaders and congregants alike participate in mutual submission under Christ’s lordship.²⁴

Furthermore, the eschatological horizon of 1 Peter 5:1–11 provides a framework for resilience in the face of suffering. The call to vigilance and resistance (1 Pet. 5:8–9) is closely tied to the assurance that God “will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:10, NIV). This promise reinforces the notion that present trials are temporary and purposeful within God’s redemptive plan. Leaders, therefore, are called to embody steadfast faith and courage, drawing strength from the certainty of God’s future intervention. When leaders internalize this eschatological vision, their approach to ministry is transformed. They are more likely to lead with humility, recognizing that their authority is delegated; with integrity, knowing that their actions are subject to divine scrutiny; and with a long-term spiritual perspective that prioritizes faithfulness over immediate results. In this way, Peter’s exhortation offers a corrective to both ancient and modern distortions of leadership, calling the church to a model that is deeply theological, ethically grounded, and eschatologically oriented.

Communal Responsibility and Spiritual Vigilance

Peter’s exhortation in 1 Peter 5:1–11 does not limit responsibility to elders alone but places leadership within a larger framework of communal responsibility and shared spiritual vigilance.²⁵ While elders are explicitly tasked with oversight, the entire congregation is called to actively participate in the church’s life, health, and mission. This is especially clear in the exhortation to “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another” (1 Pet 5:5, NIV). The phrase “all of you” (πάντες) indicates that the ethical and spiritual demands of the passage go beyond leadership structures to include the entire Christian community. Therefore, leadership in 1 Peter is not isolated but integrated within a network of mutual accountability, humility, and shared responsibility.

This communal approach is reinforced by the call to mutual submission, which fosters humility, unity, and shared responsibility within the Christian community. Instruction for younger members to submit to elders (1 Pet 5:5a) is immediately balanced by the broader command for all believers to practice humility in their relationships. This reciprocity prevents the development of

²⁴ Ruth Anne Reese, *1 Peter* (Cambridge New York (N.Y.): Cambridge University Press, 2022), 146.

²⁵ Victor I. Ezigbo, *Introducing Christian Theologies, Volume One: Voices from Global Christian Communities* (Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock, 2013), 170.



rigid hierarchies and instead encourages a relational dynamic built on service and interdependence. Petrine ecclesiology presents a vision of the church as a participatory community where leadership and membership are closely connected. Elders lead not as distant authorities but as fellow participants on the same spiritual journey, accountable to both Christ and the community they serve.²⁶

The call for spiritual vigilance is key to this communal framework. Peter’s warning that “your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8) introduces a vivid metaphor that highlights the reality of spiritual opposition. This imagery draws from both Jewish and Greco-Roman symbolic worlds, where the lion symbolizes danger, power, and predatory intent.²⁷ By using this metaphor, Peter stresses the importance of alertness and the constant threat posed by forces that aim to weaken believers’ faith and unity. Spiritual vigilance, therefore, is not optional but vital for the survival and growth of the Christian community. It also underscores the need for spiritual vigilance to redirect the life of every believer in a way that honors God and to live in a way that ultimately proclaims Christ despite difficult situations.

For elders, this vigilance involves more than just administrative oversight or doctrinal instruction. It includes spiritual discernment, the ability to identify and respond to threats such as false teaching, moral compromise, and spiritual complacency. Elders are encouraged to guide the congregation in developing a disciplined, watchful faith, helping believers handle the complexities of their social and religious environments. In early Christian communities, which often faced social marginalization and cultural suspicion, such discernment was vital for preserving both doctrinal integrity and community unity.²⁸

However, Peter does not place the burden of vigilance only on leaders. The command to “be sober-minded; be watchful” (1 Pet 5:8) is directed to the entire community, showing that spiritual alertness is a shared responsibility. This collective aspect is further emphasized in the instruction to “resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Pet 5:9). The Greek verb ἀντίστητε, a plural imperative, highlights that resisting the devil is a group effort rather than an individual task. The church stands strong together, drawing strength from a shared faith and common identity in Christ.

²⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (IVP Academic, 1988), 248.

²⁷ David G. Horrell and Andrew Lincoln, *1 Peter* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008), 144.

²⁸ Charles B. Cousar, trans., *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 98.



This communal resistance is deeply tied to the experience of suffering. Peter reminds his readers that “the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:9, NIV). This statement situates local struggles within a global context, fostering solidarity among believers. Suffering is not an isolated event but a shared reality that unites the Christian community. Such awareness fosters mutual support, empathy, and perseverance, helping believers endure trials with a sense of purpose and hope.

Elders play a vital role in fostering this environment of shared vigilance and resilience. By demonstrating steadfast faith and humility, they set the tone for the community’s response to challenges. Their leadership involves nurturing a culture where believers support one another, carry each other’s burdens, and grow together toward spiritual maturity. This aligns with modern views that see Petrine leadership as inherently communal, emphasizing building a strong, participatory community rather than elevating individual authority.

Furthermore, this shared vigilance enhances the church’s witness in the world. A community united in faith, alert to spiritual threats, and supportive during suffering offers a powerful testimony to the transformative power of the gospel. It avoids fragmentation and division, embodying the unity and love that define the people of God. In this way, Peter’s exhortation weaves together leadership, community, and mission into a clear vision of church life.

1 Peter 5:1–11 outlines a model of leadership that is closely tied to community involvement and spiritual watchfulness. Elders are tasked with guiding and equipping, but the entire congregation shares the duty of sustaining the church’s spiritual health. Through mutual humility, collective resistance, and shared perseverance, the community demonstrates a resilient faith that withstands opposition and pushes forward its mission. Peter’s vision urges both historic and modern churches to adopt a leadership style that is deeply relational, spiritually alert, and rooted in community.

Conclusion

1 Peter 5:1–11 provides a profound and lasting theological foundation for understanding church leadership. It is rooted in the metaphor of shepherding and shaped by the realities of suffering, accountability, and eschatological hope. Peter’s encouragement combines several key aspects of leadership, servant leadership, a shepherd-like character, collective oversight, courage in suffering, accountability to Christ, and communal responsibility, presenting them as essential elements of



faithful ministry rather than optional ideals. These components together form a view of leadership that is deeply theological, relational, and mission-focused.

At the core of this passage is a redefinition of leadership that shifts the focus from power, status, and self-interest toward humility, service, and sacrificial care. Unlike many modern and postmodern leadership models that emphasize individualism, visibility, and measurable success, Petrine leadership is based on the example of Christ, the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4). This Christ-centered approach challenges leaders to see their role not as a platform for personal gain but as a divine calling exercised under Christ’s authority and upheld by His grace. Leadership, therefore, is neither a profession nor a way to promote oneself; it is a vocation characterized by stewardship, responsibility, and accountability before God.

Furthermore, Peter’s focus on suffering and vigilance highlights the high cost of Christian leadership. Elders are called to guide God’s people in situations that may include opposition, marginalization, and spiritual struggle. However, this suffering is not without purpose or hope. The promise of the “unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4) and the guarantee that God will “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” His people (1 Pet. 5:10) ground leadership in an eschatological outlook. This future-focused view not only helps leaders endure hardship but also shifts their view of success, moving it from quick results to lasting faithfulness.

The communal aspect of leadership highlighted in the passage is equally important. Peter does not separate elders from the congregation but places them within a community marked by mutual submission, shared watchfulness, and collective responsibility. The call for all believers to wear humility (1 Pet 5:5) and to stand against the devil together (1 Pet 5:9) emphasizes the participatory nature of church life. Therefore, leadership is not practiced alone but in partnership with a community that actively supports its own spiritual growth and mission. This perspective challenges hierarchical and authoritarian leadership models and instead promotes a relational, collaborative approach that fosters unity and strength.

For the postmodern church, especially in settings facing leadership crises, burnout, and rapid institutional change, 1 Peter 5:1–11 offers both correction and hope. It urges leaders to follow a shepherding model that emphasizes character over charisma, service over status, and faithfulness over visible success. Simultaneously, it reassures the church that its ultimate stability relies not solely on human leadership but on God’s sustaining grace. When elders follow this shepherd model



and congregations share responsibility, the church becomes more faithful, united, and resilient in facing challenges.

In this way, Petrine leadership not only addresses current realities but also guides the church toward its eschatological future. It is based on the promise that God Himself is actively working in His people, bringing their faith to completion. Therefore, 1 Peter 5:1–11 stands as a timeless and transformative vision of leadership, one that calls the church to live faithfully under the lordship of Christ while looking forward to the full realization of His coming kingdom.

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